April 1936

ON INITIATIC QUALIFICATIONS

In our previous articles, we have often alluded to initiatory qualifications, and we have received numerous questions on this subject from various quarters. To be honest, it is hardly possible to claim to treat it comprehensively, but at least we can offer some clarification. First of all, it must be clearly understood that these qualifications pertain exclusively to the individual. Indeed, if we were to consider only the personality or the "Self," there would be no distinction to be made in this respect between beings, and all would be equally qualified, without the slightest exception. But the question arises quite differently because individuality must necessarily be taken as the means and support of initiatory realization. Consequently, it must possess the aptitudes required to play this role, and this is not always the case. Individuality is, in this sense, merely the instrument of the true being. However, if this instrument has certain defects, it may be more or less completely unusable, or even entirely unsuitable for its intended purpose. There is nothing surprising in this, if one considers that, even in the realm of secular activities, what is possible for one person is not possible for another, and that, for example, the practice of a particular profession requires certain special aptitudes, both mental and physical. The essential difference is that, in this case, it is an activity that falls entirely within the individual sphere, which in no way or respect transcends it, whereas, with regard to initiation, the result to be achieved is, on the contrary, beyond the limits of individuality; but, once again, individuality must nonetheless be taken as the starting point, and this is a condition from which it is impossible to escape.

We can also say this: the being who undertakes the work of initiatory realization must necessarily begin from a certain state of manifestation, the one in which they are currently situated, and which comprises a

whole set of determined conditions: on the one hand, the conditions inherent to this state that define it in a general way, and, on the other hand, those which, within this same state, are particular to each individual and differentiate them from all others. It is evident that it is these latter conditions that must be considered with regard to qualifications, since this is something which, by definition, is not common to all individuals, but properly characterizes only those who belong, at least virtually, to the "elite," understood in the sense we have previously specified.

Now, it is essential to understand that individuality must be taken here as it actually is, with all its constituent elements, and that there can be qualifications concerning each of these elements, including the bodily element itself, which must in no way be treated, from this point of view, as something indifferent or negligible. Perhaps there would be no need to insist on this so much if we were not faced with the grossly simplified conception that modern Westerners have of the human being: not only is individuality for them the entire being, but this individuality itself is reduced to two parts supposedly completely separate from one another, the first being the body, and the second something rather poorly defined, which is designated indifferently by the most diverse and sometimes the least appropriate names. But the reality is quite different: the multiple elements of individuality, however one might classify them, are not thus isolated from one another, but form a whole in which there can be no radical and irreducible heterogeneity; and all of them, the body as well as the others, are, in the same way, manifestations or expressions of being in the various modalities of the individual domain. Between these modalities, there are correspondences such that what happens in one normally has repercussions in the others; It follows that, on the one hand, the state of the body can influence other modalities in a certain way, either favorably or unfavorably, and that, on the other hand, the reverse being no less true, it can provide signs that tangibly reflect the very state of these modalities; it is clear that these two complementary considerations are both important with regard to initiatory qualifications. All this would be perfectly obvious if the Western notion of "matter," Cartesian dualism, and more or less "mechanistic" conceptions had

not so obscured these things for most of our contemporaries; it is these contingent circumstances that compel us to dwell on such elementary considerations, which would otherwise suffice to state in a few words, without having to add the slightest explanation.

It goes without saying that the essential qualification, the one that dominates all the others, is a question of intellectual horizon—more or less broad. But it can happen that the possibilities of an intellectual order, while being present virtually in an individuality, are, due to the elements are, due to its inferior elements, prevented from developing, either temporarily or even permanently. This is the first reason for what could be called secondary qualifications; and there is a second reason that follows immediately from what we have just said: it is that, in these elements, which are the most accessible to observation, one can find signs of certain intellectual limitations; in this latter case, the secondary qualifications become, in a way, symbolic equivalents of the fundamental qualification itself. In the first case, on the contrary, it may be that they do not always have equal importance: thus, there may be obstacles opposing any initiation, even merely virtual, or only to an effective initiation, or even to the passage to higher or lower degrees; and it must also be added that there are special impediments that may concern only certain forms of initiation.

On this last point, it suffices to recall that the diversity of initiation methods, whether from one traditional form to another or within the same traditional form, is precisely intended to compensate for the diversity of individual aptitudes; it would obviously have no reason to exist if a single method could suit all those who are, generally speaking, qualified to receive initiation. Since this is not the case, each initiatory organization must have its own particular technique, and it will naturally only be able to admit those who are capable of conforming to it and deriving an effective benefit from it. This implies, with regard to qualifications, the application of a whole set of special rules, valid only for the organization in question, and in no way excluding, for those excluded by this, the possibility of finding an equivalent initiation elsewhere, provided they possess the general qualifications that are

absolutely essential in all cases. One of the clearest examples that can be given in this regard is the fact that it that there are forms of initiation that are exclusively male, while there are others where women can be admitted; one can therefore say that a certain qualification is required in one case and not in the other, and that this difference stems from the particular modes of initiation in question; we will return to this point later, as we have observed that this fact is generally very poorly understood in our time.

Therefore, since there is a traditional social organization, even in the external order, each person, being in the place that corresponds to their individual nature, should thereby be able to find more easily, if they are qualified, the mode of initiation that corresponds to their abilities. Thus, if one considers the organization of castes from this perspective, the initiation of the Kshatriyas cannot be identical to that of the Brahmins, and so on; And, more specifically, a certain form of initiation can be directly linked to the practice of a particular trade, as we have explained elsewhere. This can only have its full value if the trade practiced by each individual is indeed the one for which they are destined by the aptitudes inherent in their very nature, such that these aptitudes will simultaneously form an integral part of the special qualifications required for the corresponding form of initiation.

On the contrary, where nothing is organized according to traditional and normal rules, as is the case in the modern Western world, the result is a confusion that extends to all areas, inevitably leading to multiple complications and difficulties in precisely determining initiatory qualifications, since the individual's place in society then bears only a very distant relation to their nature, and often only the most external and least important aspects of it are taken into consideration—that is, those which have no real value whatsoever, even secondary, from an initiatory point of view. Another cause of difficulty, which is added to this one and is, moreover, to a certain extent linked to it, is the neglect of traditional sciences: the data from some of them can provide the means of recognizing the true nature of an individual, and when they are lacking, it is never possible, by any other means whatsoever, to

completely and perfectly compensate for them; whatever is done in this regard, there will always be a greater or lesser degree of "empiricism" which can give rise to many errors. This is one of the main reasons for the degeneration of certain initiatory organizations: the admission of unqualified members, whether through sheer ignorance of the rules that should eliminate them, or through the impossibility of applying them reliably, is indeed one of the factors that contributes most to this degeneration, and can even, if it becomes widespread, ultimately lead to the complete ruin of such an organization.

Before moving on to the second part of this study, in which we will place greater emphasis on the true significance that should be attributed to secondary qualifications, there is one more point to which we must draw attention: in addition to the qualifications required for initiation into the rite, which are those we are considering here, there may also be other, more specific qualifications required only to fulfill a particular function within an initiatory organization. These are two things that it is important never to confuse, and this distinction corresponds to the one we indicated in our last article concerning the initiatory hierarchy; it will therefore suffice, to understand the reason for this, to refer to what we said then; and we will only add that the aptitude to receive initiation, even up to the highest degree, does not necessarily imply the aptitude to exercise any function whatsoever, even the simplest of all. It must also be clearly understood that the function, whatever it may be, is never more than an accidental and contingent character; what alone is truly essential is the initiation itself with its degrees, since it is this that effectively influences the real state of being, while the function cannot in any way modify it or add anything to it.

(*to be continued*)

SYMBOLIC FLOWERS

The use of flowers in symbolism is, as is well known, very widespread and found in most traditions; it is also very complex, and our intention here can only be to indicate some of its most general meanings. It is evident, in fact, that depending on which flower is chosen as a symbol, the meaning must vary, at least in its secondary modalities, and also that, as is generally the case in symbolism, each flower can itself have a plurality of meanings, moreover linked to one another by certain correspondences.

One of the principal meanings relates to the feminine or passive principle of manifestation, that is to say, to Prakriti, the Universal Substance; and, in this respect, the flower is equivalent to a number of other symbols, among which one of the most important is the cup. Like the flower, in fact, the flower evokes by its very form the idea of a "receptacle," which is what Prakriti is for the influences emanating from Purusha, and we also commonly speak of the "calyx" of a flower. Furthermore, the blossoming of this same flower simultaneously represents the development of manifestation itself, considered as a product of Prakriti; and this double meaning is particularly clear in a case like that of the lotus, which in the East is the symbolic flower par excellence, and which has the special characteristic of blooming on the surface of water, which, as we have explained elsewhere, always represents the domain of a certain state of manifestation, or the plane of reflection of the "Celestial Ray" that expresses the influence of Purusha at work on this domain to realize the possibilities potentially contained within it, enveloped in the primordial undifferentiation of Prakriti[1].

The connection we have just indicated with the cup naturally brings to mind the symbolism of the Grail in Western traditions; and it is precisely on this subject that a remark of great interest should be made. It is known that, among the various other objects that legend associates with the Grail, there is notably a lance, which, in the Christian adaptation, is

1 See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, Ch.XXIV

none other than the lance of the centurion Longinus, through which the wound was opened in Christ's side from which flowed the blood and water that Joseph of Arimathea collected in the cup of the Last Supper; but it is nonetheless true that this lance, or one of its equivalents, already existed, as a symbol somewhat complementary to the cup, in traditions predating Christianity[2]. The spear, when placed vertically, is one of the figures of the "Axis of the World," which is identified with the "Celestial Ray" we mentioned earlier; and we can also recall, in this regard, the frequent assimilation of the solar ray to weapons such as the spear or the arrow, which we will not dwell on further here. On the other hand, in some representations, drops of blood fall from the spear itself into the cup; now, these drops of blood are, in their primary meaning, nothing other than the image of the influences emanating from Purusha, which also evokes the Vedic symbolism of Purusha's sacrifice at the origin of manifestation[3]; and this will bring us directly back to the question of floral symbolism, from which we have only strayed in appearance with these considerations. In the myth of Adonis (whose name, incidentally, means "the Lord"), when the hero is mortally wounded by the tusk of a boar, which here plays the same role as the spear[4], his blood, spilling onto the ground, gives birth to a flower; and one could doubtless easily find other similar examples. This is also found in Christian symbolism: thus, M. Charbonneau-Lassay pointed out "a wafer iron from the 12th century where the blood from the wounds of the Crucified is seen falling in droplets that transform into roses, and the 13th-century stained-glass window of Angers Cathedral where the divine blood, flowing in streams, also blossoms in the form of roses"[5]. The rose is, in fact, along with the lily, one of the most common equivalents of what the lotus is in the East; here. It also seems that the symbolism of the flower is

2 cf. The King of the World, p. 51. One could relate, among the different cases where the spear is used as a symbol, curious similarities even in points of detail: thus, among the Greeks, the spear of Achilles was believed to heal the wounds it had caused; medieval legend attributes the same power to the spear of the Passion.

3 One could also, in certain respects, draw a parallel here with the well-known symbolism of the pelican.

4 Much could be said about the symbolism of the boar and its polar character, which also relates it precisely to the "World Axis."

5 Regnabit, January 1925. We should also mention, as relating to a connected symbolism, the representation of the five wounds of Christ by five roses, one placed at the center of the cross and the other four between its arms, a combination which also constitutes one of the principal Rosicrucian symbols.

related solely to the production of manifestation[6], and that Prakriti is rather represented by the very earth that blood vivifies; but there are also cases where it seems to be otherwise. In the same article we have just cited, M. Charbonneau-Lassay reproduces a design embroidered on an altarpiece from the Abbey of Fontevraud, dating from the first half of the 16th century and now kept in the Naples Museum, where a rose is seen placed at the foot of a vertically erect lance, along which drops of blood are falling. This rose appears there associated with the lance exactly as the cup is elsewhere, and it seems to collect the drops of blood rather than originating from the transformation of one of them; Moreover, it is evident that the two meanings are not at all opposed, but rather complement each other, for these drops, falling upon the rose, also enliven it and cause it to bloom; and it goes without saying that this symbolic role of blood has, in all cases, its basis in its direct relationship with the vital principle, transposed here into the cosmic order. This rain of blood is also equivalent to the "celestial dew" which, according to Kabbalistic doctrine, emanates from the "Tree of Life," another figure of the "Axis of the World," and whose life-giving influence is primarily linked to the ideas of regeneration and resurrection, clearly connected to the Christian idea of Redemption; and this same dew also plays an important role in alchemical and Rosicrucian symbolism[7].

When the flower is considered to represent the development of manifestation, there is also an equivalence between it and other symbols, among which the wheel deserves special mention. This wheel is found almost everywhere, with varying numbers of spokes depending on the depiction, but each always possesses a particular symbolic value in itself. The most common types are the six- and eight-spoked wheels; the Celtic "wheel," which persisted throughout almost the entire Western Middle Ages, appears in both of these forms. These same figures, and especially the second, are very frequently found in Eastern countries, notably in Chaldea and Assyria, in India, and in

6 It must be clearly understood, so that this interpretation cannot give rise to any objection, that there is a very close relationship between "Creation" and "Redemption," which are, in short, only two aspects of the operation of the Divine Word.

7 Cf. The King of the World, p. 31. The similarity that exists between the name of dew (ros) and that of rose (rosa) cannot fail to be noticed by those who know how frequent the use of a certain phonetic symbolism is.

Tibet. Now, the wheel is always, first and foremost, a symbol of the World; in the symbolic language of the Hindu tradition, one constantly speaks of the "wheel of things" or the "wheel of life," which clearly corresponds to this meaning; and allusions to the "cosmic wheel" are no less frequent in the Far Eastern tradition. This is sufficient to establish The close relationship of these figures with symbolic flowers, whose blossoming is also a radiance around the center, is evident, for they too are "centered" figures; and it is known that, in the Hindu tradition, the World is sometimes represented as a lotus in the center of which rises Meru, the "polar mountain." Moreover, there are clear correspondences, further reinforcing this equivalence, between the number of petals on some of these flowers and the number of spokes on the wheel: thus, the lily has six petals, and the lotus, in its most common representations, has eight, so that they correspond respectively to the six- and eight-spoked wheels we have just discussed[8]. As for the rose, it is depicted with a variable number of petals; we will only note in this regard that, generally speaking, the numbers five and six relate respectively to the "microcosm" and the "macrocosm"; Furthermore, in alchemical symbolism, the five-petaled rose, placed at the center of the cross representing the quaternary of elements, is also, as we have already noted here in another study, the symbol of the "quintessence," which, moreover, plays a role analogous to that of Prakriti in relation to corporeal manifestation[9]. Finally, we will also mention the kinship of the six-petaled roses and the six-spoked wheel with certain other equally widespread symbols, such as that of the "Chi-Rho," which we intend to discuss on another occasion[10]. For now, it will suffice to have showed the two most important similarities of the floral symbols, with the cup insofar as they relate to Prakriti, and with the wheel insofar as they

---

8 We have noted, as a very clear example of such an equivalence in the Middle Ages, the eight-spoked wheel and an eight-petaled flower depicted opposite each other on the same sculpted stone, embedded in the facade of the old church of Saint-Maxime in Chinon, and which most likely dates from the Carolingian period. The wheel is, moreover, very often found depicted on Romanesque churches, and the Gothic rose window itself, whose name likens it to floral symbols, seems to be derived from it, so that it would thus be linked, by an unbroken lineage, to the ancient Celtic wheel.

9 The Hindu theory of the five elements (August-September 1935 issue).

10 Mr. Charbonneau-Lassay noted the association of the rose itself with the Chi-Rho monogram (Regnabit, March 1926 issue); in a figure of this kind that he reproduced from a Merovingian brick, the central rose has six petals which are oriented along the branches of the Chi-Rho; moreover, the latter is enclosed in a circle, which makes its identity with the six-spoked wheel appear as clearly as possible.

relate to cosmic manifestation, the relationship of these two meanings being, moreover, in short, a relationship of principle to consequence, since Prakriti is the very root of all manifestation.